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Statement submitted by NeuroCare Ethiopia, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Advancing neurological care as a poverty reduction strategy

Introduction

Global NeuroCare, formerly NeuroCare Ethiopia, holding Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), fully supports the 2017 High-level Segment theme ("eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions through promoting sustainable development") by focusing on strategies to achieve the Sustainable Developmental Goals, particularly Goal 3 seeking to "ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages," thereby reducing poverty [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1) or 'Agenda'].

Findings

Poverty and health are inextricably entwined. The success of any poverty reduction strategy must be premised on improving healthcare, focusing on the most crucial needs. This necessitates addressing neurological disorders, which are the greatest threat to global public health. [World Health Organization (WHO) 2006, Neurological Disorders: Public Health Challenges].

The non-communicable neurological disorders are particularly disconcerting because the associated high rate of morbidity results in millions of people afflicted by poor cognition and physical impairment, and thus unable to reach their full potential, resulting in limited education, lost income and fewer opportunities, yet with overwhelming medical and social needs. This situation lowers productivity, increases marginalization, and exacerbates poverty, with profound effects on the economic, social and political stability of developing countries, which may precipitate civil disturbances and incite terrorism.

The single most effective means of combating these non-communicable disorders is to increase recruitment, training and retention of local medical staff in developing regions, especially in the least developed countries. This requires establishing a self-sufficient local training program to ensure sustainable staff development, an approach Global NeuroCare supports in Ethiopia, where the Addis Ababa University Neurology Residency Training Program has graduated 30 board-certified neurologists, each delivering care to many thousands of patients and, more importantly for the 100 million people in this underserved region, teaching general physicians how to care for common neurological conditions.

Establishing this type of training requires external support, which is seemingly available through the unprecedented growth of global health programs in the North, especially in United States of America academic medical centers. However, these programs have created a scramble for Africa characterized by brief self-serving medical missions that are highly advantageous to the sending institution, yet fail to provide any substantive benefit to the host nation and, in fact, can and do cause actual harm, impeding development of local medical care in the very regions it is most needed. Global NeuroCare reaffirms previous statements highlighting these harmful practices [E/2016/NGO/53; E/CN.5/2017/NGO/19].

Without action, the dangerous practices engendered by these medical missions will escalate with the continuing growth of global health programs. It is imperative to formulate guidelines for collaborative health partnerships to ensure developed countries 'do no harm,' thus protecting inherently vulnerable populations and improving healthcare [UN Charter, Articles 55,56]. Global NeuroCare reiterates an earlier statement summarizing model guidelines. [E/CN.5/2017/NGO/19].

Recommendations

Global NurseCare reaffirms previous recommendations to appoint a Special Rapporteur or Independent Expert in global health with a directive to publish relevant guidelines that will ethically promote North-South collaborative partnerships in accordance with the Agenda, thereby advancing healthcare and reducing poverty [E/CN.5/2017/NGO/19].